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Uncle Sam's Honor

A case getting more complicated every day is being tried in the United States District Court in Baltimore. Erik Heine, an Estonian emigre, is suing Juri Raus, another Estonian emigre, for \$110,000 damages for slander.

Mr. Raus once called Mr. Heine a "dispatched Soviet intelligence operative." Mr. Heine says that was untrue and asks damages. Mr. Raus, it has developed, did indeed make that statement about Mr. Heine—on orders of the Central Intelligence Agency, for which he was a part-time agent.

The CIA has ordered Mr. Raus not to say anything further about his connection with the CIA or about his involvement with Mr. Heine. Under the law, the CIA can in certain circumstances keep its agents from breaking security rules even by testifying in court.

From this distance, it seems that the questions of whether the CIA

should have the power to order an agent to slander someone and whether it should be able to hide facts from a court are not relevant. What is involved is the honor of the United States, entrusted to the CIA.

It appears that a CIA agent, acting on orders, slandered a man and damaged his reputation. If the CIA doesn't wish to explain, so be it. But no agency should be immune from the responsibility for paying for the damage it does. If an Army tank were misdirected over a civilian's lawn, the civilian would quickly claim recompense from the Army. Mr. Heine is entitled, morally at least, to be compensated for the damage to his reputation.

The CIA should shell out the \$110,000, or whatever amount of damage the court decides was done to Mr. Heine, with no more delays of trial and maneuver. Whatever the legal principles involved, the honor of the United States must be protected.